JOIN AND SUPPORT ODRC WATCH: A NEW SUPPORT NETWORK FOR OHIO PRISONERS (2021)

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

I have spent nearly two decades writing about the abuses of U.S. prisons. There are very few people who do this. Outside journalists have basically no inside access to prisons and few prisoners are willing to speak out as witnesses or victims. (1) In the absolute world of prisons where officials control every aspect of a our existence, the risks that come with speaking out are very real and very brutal, which I know all too well from personal experience.

But it is the lack of exposure and public awareness that allows a lot of the abuses that occur to exist and continue with impunity. In fact it is the lack of exposure that leads many to doubt reports even from their own imprisoned loved ones when they've fallen victim to abuse, or it leaves those on the outside who care powerless and clueless what to do in response.

Ohio has one of America's most notoriously abusive prisons, the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility aka Lucasville prison. Lucasville is run by an overtly racist staff (with a few token Blacks as window dressing), with almost no oversight or control from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction headquartered in Columbus, OH.

A rare glimpse was given into the systemic racism and abuse at the prison in 2017, when video footage was leaked and went viral on social media, of an incident where white guards in the solitary confinement unit gave a documented white supremacist inmate a cuff key allowing him to escape his own restraints and repeatedly stab four Black prisoners whom the guards had cuffed to a stationary steel table. The white inmate was allowed to carry two shanks on his person while the Black prisoners were strip searched beforehand.

As the assault occurred the guards watched laughing from behind a locked gate, and could be heard remarking that they should let the victims just die. When one of the victims managed to free himself from his cuffs and tackled the assailant, the guards tear gassed the victim. Other guards then beat one of the victims for requiring medical attention. This video is still posted on social media and the incident

received international media attention. (2) Ronald Erdos was the warden of Lucasville when this happened. That he STILL IS the warden testifies to the entrenched corruption and abusive impunity that thrives at Lucasville.

Every day prisoners are set up and beaten by guards here, tortured with chemical weapons, and starved for days to weeks on end. Hangings by guards, and suicides and suicide attempts as a result of the idleness, despair and isolation, are rampant (one prisoner just hung to death on September 22, 2021 another was attempted just a week later). This only scratches the surface of the inhumane conditions in a prison run by an administration that has presided over documented racism and abuse.

In 1993 prisoners at Lucasville were forced to rise up in protest against these very abuses, nine of them were murdered by guards in retaliation, and others were railroaded onto death row. A class action lawsuit was brought which led to a settlement agreement that was supposed to change conditions at the prison, including training guards in racial and cultural sensitivity, extensive out of cell activities and programs for the prisoners, a settlement fund and much else. (3) All of those agreed changes were scrapped long ago, and Lucasville remains an island of corruption.

These abuses continue because they are HIDDEN BEHIND WALLS AND RAZOR WIRE, that are used not just to keep us in, but to keep the public's eyes out; and because there is no public support structure for Ohio prisoners.

Ohio prisoners and their loved ones need a network of support that can bring broad public awareness and organized protest against these conditions, to direct COLLECTIVE pressure where it counts and compel accountability and oversight where presently there clearly is NONE.

The newly-created ODRC Watch is that network. Follow, join and support ODRC Watch on Facebook at "ODRCWatch" and on Twitter and Instagram /@ODRCWatch.

ODRC Watch is an outside/inside support network that will be and is composed of the people who genuinely care about the conditions that people suffer under within Ohio prisons, namely prisoners, and their loved ones and supporters. Our social media pages will serve as an information platform where reports of conditions will be posted and

followers and members can network, brainstorm and organize support, responses and campaigns.
Every Ohio prisoner reading this should share our social media links with your loved ones, friends and supporters; put other prisoners in contact; and submit reports and complaints to us about abuses you have suffered or witnessed. ODRC Watch is YOUR voice on the outside. It is only as strong as the network you build in and around it.
Join, follow, and support ODRC Watch!
Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!

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Endnote:

1. A noted exception to the lack of journalism about the abuses in U.S. prisons is the MIAMI HERALD, which since 2014 has covered the frequent murders, beatings and abuses of Florida prisoners, which has earned the HERALD and Julie Brown, its main journalist who covers these stories, the ire and many violent threats (which the HERALD has also reported) from Florida prison officials.
2. Several of the victims sued and received a $75,000 settlement. See, Matt Londberg, "Just Let Them Die: Guards Laughed as Supremacist Stabbed Cuffed Black Inmates Suit Says," CINCINNATI ENQUIRER, (April 20, 2019), Cincinnati.com
3. See, IN RE SOUTHERN OHIO CORRECTIONAL FACILITY, 175 F.R.D. 270, 1997 U.S. District LEXIS 12556 (July 23, 1997)